CHAPTER III

THE FORMATIVE YEARS - AN INSIGHT INTO THE MIND
AND ART OF GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell has written three autobiographies, *Such, Such were the Joys*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and *Homage to Catalonia*. One thing that comes out of these three formal chronicles is closely related to the making of Orwell's mind. He described his own class as the lower upper-middle class. In his very first novel *Burmese Days*, he reflected on his complex of class and poverty through the scarred face of the hero, Flory. The scarred face of the hero represented the stigma which Orwell himself had felt as a child. He always had felt that he was the 'wrong person in the right place' or 'the right child in the wrong place.' As the trademark of his personality, he writes much too frankly about the social position of his family:

"I was born into what you might describe as the lower upper-middle class. The upper-middle class, which had its heyday in the eighties and nineties, with Kipling as its poet laureate, was a sort of a mound of wreckage left behind when the tide of Victorian prosperity receded. Or perhaps it would be better to change the metaphor and describe it not as a mound but as a layer—the layer of society lying between £2,000 and £300 a year: my own family was not far from the bottom." ¹

¹ Orwell George, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. p. 123
George Orwell, whose real name was Eric Blair, was born on 25 June, 1903 at Motihari (now in Bihar, then in Bengal) in India. His father Richard Walmesly Blair, who belonged to the Opium Department of the Indian Service retired on a very small pension when Orwell was a mere child. He developed an unusual sensitiveness to his social category which he himself called 'the lower-upper middle class,' precisely explained by him in these words:

'...the upper-middle class without money, but for literary and polemical purposes he exaggerated. The Blairs were not 'shabby, genteel': if not 'well off, they were certainly comfortable.'

Perhaps Orwell did not feel comfortable about his social position. Audrey Coppard & Bernard Crick have written that 'the Blairs were not 'shabby,' 'though not well off, not uncomfortable.' But to my mind, I feel that Orwell himself was the most competent to write about himself. May be that was the reason why one of his most intimate friends Laurence Brander explained about Orwell’s wish that

"there should not be biography."
Before his death, writers on him (Orwell) honoured his desire and restrained from writing his biography. But after his death, to honour his request could be to dishonour him as it were. His childhood friend Jacintha Buddicom, whose friendship he won by standing on his head at Shiplake-on-Thames in Oxfordshire in 1915 refuted Orwell’s self condemnation and complaint of shabby wretchedness.

She writes,

"His parents’ finances were doubtless straitened when Mr. Blair retired and Marjorie’s (Orwell’s elder sister) school fees had to be found as well as Eric’s; but when we know the family they did not seem drastically impoverished. The children had the usual little treats that we had, and Eric had enough pocket money to buy quantities of books for me as well as himself. He had a gun, a fishing-rod, a bicycle, like Prosper and his contemporaries, and the Blairs went for seaside holidays, more than once to Polperro. There was no harping or inferiority and poverty by Eric then. In any contest with Prosper and his friends, Eric gave as good as he got: usually better, because he had more brains. The picture painted of a wretched little neurotic, snivelling miserably before a swarm of swanking bullies, suspecting that he ‘smelt,’ just was not Eric at all."

Jacintha Buddicom knew the boy Eric very well indeed for about seven years. They were constant companions during the holidays and when he was at Eton and she was at the Oxford High School, they wrote to each

4. Brackets mine.
5. -(underlined is in italics) Young Eric
other nearly every week. She knew plenty of boys to compare Orwell with, and in such a comparison, she rated Eric a very high score. Buddicom had quite a nice compliment for the young Eric:

"He may not have been so good-looking as the handsomest, or have achieved a place in a Cricket XI or rowing crew, but among all the boys we know, Eric was one of the most interesting, the best informed, the kindest, the nicest." 7

George Orwell would have resented the compliments of Jacintha Buddicom if the above lines were found in print while he was alive, primarily because he had the peculiar resentment of someone attempting to write his biography. Christopher Hollis remarked on Orwell's attitude towards someone who ventured to write his biography:

"George Orwell expressed a wish that no biography of him should be written and it is proper that such a wish be respected .... there is no greater vulgarity than the gossip writer who thinks of every private secret as a marketable article. The burden of justification rests upon anyone who discovers and reveals secrets contrary to an expressed wish, and a writer in particular is entitled to say to the public, 'I have sought to influence you by my writings, judge them, if you will, but what I was - a part from my writings - is my own business.'" 8

Now Mr. Christopher Hollis had been with Orwell at Eton in 1916. Obviously, he could claim to know him more intimately than other writers on Orwell like Mr. Brander and Mr. Atkins. He argued:

7. Ibid. p. 6
“……. they only came to know Orwell towards the end of his life during the War. Orwell and I, on the other hand, had curiously similar origins. We went under the same sort of circumstances to the same sort of private school. We were in college together at Eton, and this similarity of origin gives me perhaps an advantage in judging ….. of those who now make a habit of writing, there is I fancy, no one except Mr. Cyril Connolly who knows from experience more of those early years of Orwell than I.”

Most of Orwell’s critics rubbed shoulders with him. As a result their estimate as well as judgement of Orwell was in a way personal. But it may be very important for the purposes of the present thesis as it has been undertaken to study the mind and art of Orwell. Naturally, in a project like this one has to depend largely upon the primary sources, while not disregarding the secondary ones. Orwell himself has said:

“I do not think one can assess a writer’s motives without knowing something of his early developments.”

Orwell entered St. Cyprian’s Preparatory School near Eastbourne in 1911. He stayed there for five years and won a scholarship to Wellington and another to Eton. He left at Christmas 1916, and spent the Lent Term of 1917 at Wellington. Then he moved on to Eton as soon as a vacancy came up for his relatively low place on the scholarship roll. In spite of all the privileges, Orwell felt very unfortunate to be born into his class-upper middle class. At early age he felt the class system and this consciousness always haunted him till the last fag end of his life.

9. Ibid. p. 7
10. George Orwell Why I Write, Collected Essays (Secker & Warburg, London, 1461) p. 437
His hard and tough background of pangs and loneliness were imprinted on his young mind. But all these experiences were only the beginning of the critical times of deprivation and bitterness that awaited him in the years to come. At Christmas 1921 he left Eton to join the Burmese Police. By the standards of Eton and other institutions, his career was not brilliant enough too. He won no prizes, no university entrance, no prospects or passing top into the Civil Service, no first foot on a ladder leading to Ministry, Embassy, Fellowship, or Knighthood. He was in a state of social unease, consciously cut off from most other Englishmen. Though he did not rail at it, he felt it very strongly. He suffered pain imperceptibly. Tom Hopkinson discussed how Orwell felt isolated from all classes:

“Around Orwell’s cradle .... it was the bad fairies, bestower of handicaps, who got the say in first .... His family belonged to what he described as the lower-upper middle class’- worse off, in consequence, than many working class homes ...... Throughout his life Orwell was never able to identify himself successfully with any group of class. Acutely aware of social divisions, he felt himself to be outside them all-and it stemmed in part from the contrast between his own family background and that of the much wealthier boys with whom he grew up.”

It would appear that Orwell was a connoisseur of social shame both upwards and downwards: a poor boy at Eton, an Etonian among the poor. Mr. Hopkinson re-examined this point at issue with utmost care and tenderness in another booklet:

"He (Orwell) was, from childhood-from infancy indeed-hampered by lack of money, and he sees the world as a succession of money rackets. He was by birth and upbringing—or rather, through an upbringing strangely ill-suited to his birth—acutely sensitive to class distinctions, and he supposed everyone else to be as painfully affected by them as he was himself. Because they had conditioned his own life, he regards them, not as temporary phenomena doomed to a rapid disappearance, but as part of the basic order of human existence, conditions written into the lease under which man holds tenure of the earth."  

Orwell vented his anger against St. Cyprian in his bitter essay *Such, Such, were the Joys*. It was perhaps understandably bitter so much so that it was not published a long time because of fears of libel. Orwell describes the beatings, the poor food, the cramming, the prevailing mindlessness that could be matched elsewhere. Orwell could see the snobberies of the school: the absurd little boys' showing off about their homes, and the more endorsement of such standard by the staff. Orwell observed that school-masters were often the keenest supporters of school snobbery. According to Orwell, the headmaster of St. Cyprian went into ecstasies over Eton because they served the boys (including his own son) fried fish for supper. Orwell commented that fried fish was not a big deal as it was only the weekly luxury of the working class. He thought it rather pathetic or foolish to be grateful for much largesse. Orwell betrayed too much of unnatural self pity or he could be accused of retrospective hindsight.

All the memories of Orwell seemed very unusual ones for a child. But it was the evidence of a child who was not so simple like his friends who were oblivious of the deprivations or lack of money. Those who are not short of money or hard up may not be unduly sensitive about money. Possibly nobody had picked on Orwell for being poor, but he still said in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, that to send a child to school among children richer than itself was the greatest cruelty one could inflict on it. At that time he saw it from very close quarters. His classmates did not see the acknowledged role of money in their lives. But Orwell had experienced it all, the lack of money and the feeling of discomforts. Otherwise George Bott would not have remarked as below:

“At an early age, he determined that he would make £100,000 which would yield an income of £4000 and buy all the cars, houses and estate that his school friends boasted of. The alternative was ‘to become a little office boy at £40 a year and that he resolved to avoid.’” 14

George Orwell felt very odd at Eton though he won a scholarship to it in 1916. He was the odd man-out against the system. He felt like a fish out of water, but he still swam and kept himself afloat. He stood aloof from the English professional literary class. His education sharpened his sense of social embarrassment and made him to take in everything from smell to cash. He used ‘Going Skimming’ as a weapon against the assured moneyed beasts.

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of Eton and Cambridge. His defensiveness about his own middle-class origins, as expressed in the middle third part of *The Road To Wigan Pier* to some extent gained an extra edge from his education (If he had gone to a local school ....). But it will not do to dismiss his keen sense of England's class-ridden society as a 'mere' product of St. Cyprian's and Eton. Nor will it do to make him a 'typical Etonian in his untypicalness-an invested tribute which that particular school is particularly fond of. As his fellow-Etonian Christopher puts it:

"He wrote little about college at Eton because he was little interfered with there. But it does not follow from that, Eton had little influence on him." 15

Orwell himself said about this in answer to an American questionnaire:

"I was educated at Eton, 1917-21, as I had been lucky enough to win a scholarship, but I did not work there and learned very little, and I don't feel that Eton has been much of a formative influence in my life." 16

Later critics have read heroic or shameful efforts at self-denial into this phrase. To my mind, however, it seems simpler to take it at face value. It is not the education which turns the mind, but the praise, the successes, the glittering prizes. Orwell had none of these, except that initial scholarship, and

did not miss them. If we may base on Orwell’s own recounting, the most infuriating thing about the English public schools is neither cruelty nor stupidity, but a doglike desire for gratitude. Against it, indifference is the best and cruelest weapon. Wherever Orwell learnt to appreciate the virtues which English schools have falsely claimed as their prerogative, it was perhaps not at English schools. There is no reason why Orwell should be grateful to Eton. In fact, its failure to influence him was not the product of large-minded liberalism on the school’s part, but a proof of his obstinate and early independence, a thing that academics of ‘Character’ can neither spoil nor stand is genuinely strong character. The young Blair must have been one of the strongest.

Since childhood, what young Blair had been always conscious of is the ‘money stink’ which had wedged itself deeply in his nascent mind. This awareness of the importance of the place of money was closely associated with an acute class-consciousness. He testified this fact in the following way:

“I was very young, not much more than six, when I first became aware of class distinctions. Before that age my chief heroes had generally been working-class people, because they always seemed to do such interesting things, such as being fishermen and blacksmith and bricklayers. I remember the farm hands on a farm in Cornwall who used to let me ride on the drill. When they were sowing turnip would sometimes catch the ewes and milk them to give me a drink; .... and the plumber up the road with

17. Edited by Miriam Gross, ‘The World of George Orwell,’ (George Weidenfeld and Nicolson) Ltd. 5 Sinsley St. London 1971) p. 18
whose children I used to go out bird-nesting. But it was not long before I was forbidden to play with the plumber's children; they were "Common" and I was told to keep away from them. This was snobbish, if you like, but it was also necessary, for middle-class people cannot afford to let their children grow up with vulgar accents. To me in my early boyhood, nearly all children of families like mine, 'Common' people seemed almost sub-human." 17

Like a wet cement, his young mind was dented by class distinctions from early childhood. His parents did not want him to mix with the 'Common' people. He felt that he was unjustly cut off from the peers he liked. Except with his mother, he could not have a deep emotional attachment with his relatives, especially his father. Let us note his own words:

"Looking back on my childhood, after the infant years were over, I do not believe that I ever felt love for any mature person, except my mother, and even her I did not trust, in the sense that shyness made me conceal most of feelings for her." 18

What emerges from the above extract is the fact that he was a very reserved and suspicious child. He felt that adults were poking their noses and interfering in his childhood affairs, robbing him of his childhood. He felt, as an obligation, to love his father. But he simply did not like his father. He confessed:

17. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p. 127
18. George Orwell, *Such, Such were the Joys* (The Orwell Reader, Harcourt, Brace & Co. ING 1956) p. 454
"I merely disliked my father, whom I had barely seen before I was eight and who appeared to me simply as a gruff-voiced elderly man forever saying 'Don't.'" 19

He found his father as someone who always used negative words. His first impression of his father must have been that of a strict disciplinarian, possessive and over-protective father. And as he did not see his father till he was eight, his father had no place in his mind. In another place he recollected:

"I was the middle child of three, but there was a gap of five years on either side ..... For this and other reasons I was somewhat lonely." 20

Because of age-difference, there was less chance for his sisters to make any influence on him in his early life. Besides, being the only boy, sandwiched between two girls naturally left him more alone and aloof. He was the odd child even in the family with no brother to play and share with. This could be one of the 'other reasons' of his sense of loneliness. As a researcher has remarked:

"Admittedly, this sense of loneliness, which 'the bad fairies' seem to have planted so early in his mind, remained with him a perpetual torment. In fact, this impact of loneliness strikes the keynote of his mind and art, and merits, for that matter, some detailed analysis. As we said a moment ago, from his very tender and impressionable years he suffered from some sort of

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19 Ibid. p. 448
20 George Orwell, Why I Write, Collected Essays p. 435
emotional starvation. Yet, we feel that the role played by his parents must not be over-emphasised. For one can easily note some signs in him, growing fast into distinct forms as he grew up, of being solitary by nature. Not that the odd circumstances had nothing to do with the evolution of the solitary Orwell. Nevertheless, there was something unusual in the very make-up of this boy so that one could suspect that he always tended to keep himself at a safe distance from the rest of the world.” 21

One is here inclined to take note of another fact which is that a six-year old boy, Orwell was told to keep a distance from the rest of the other ‘Common’ boys, because of class distinctions. This upbringing has something to do with his strong sense of aloofness from the world. Let us quote from Mr. Hollis in this connection. He writes:

“We have, then, enough evidence to say whether his elders were to blame for driving in upon himself or whether he was a natural solitary, defending himself against the world by impenetrable barriers, and his elders wished not to attempt to break these barriers down. Whichever way it was, it is clear that in those early years his nature was taking on itself the pattern by which it was to be marked through life. The Orwellian man, whether we take Orwell’s fragments of autobiography or the main characters in any of his novels, is always a solitary - a member of society which is congenial to him - standing out alone in front of it, as Orwell stood in ‘Shooting an Elephant’ - refusing obstinately and often unreasonably to make compromises with it as Gordon Comstock refuses in ‘Keep the Aspidistra Flying,’ and finding his true life in a private life to which others could not penetrate but which they might, and all too frequently did, destroy. This pattern had already taken form in these young years.” 22

22. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, 1956 p. 1
One of the basic similarities between man and animal is the power to reproduce young ones. And the basic difference again is that animals cannot produce their own environment. Orwell created a sort of private world, friends, playmates, imaginary friends as he was not allowed to mix with other lower classes. Mr. Hollis also writes of himself:

"Certainly during those early years, I always lived a second imaginary life ...." 26

A child during those early years is prone to daydreaming or fantacizing as Mr. Hollis has put it. The early habit of George Orwell came to have a great formative influence on him as should be clear from the following remark:

"It will readily be seen how this early habit came to have a great formative influence on Orwell. This curious attempt on his part to shelter himself in a self-built private world planted in him a set of two contradictory elements, namely, reticence and some kind of gauchness and unperceptiveness - later known as characteristically Orwellian traits." 27

Yes, perhaps, George Orwell was a deeply private, austere, simple-living (but high thinking) and somewhat inhibited man. One just wonders.

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26. Christopher Hollis, _A Study of George Orwell_ p. 2
whether he had any intimate friend with whom he could unburden himself and discuss his problems and difficulties. This was developed most probably early in childhood and with time it formed into a habit. Julian Symons threw some light on this aspect saying that with Orwell,

"-letters, manuscripts, odds and ends from the workshop of his mind, it is possible to feel very often that they seem almost ridiculously incompatible with the person one knows...... George Orwell ......kept his life and friends in compartments shut off from each other. Many people do this, of course, but few seal off the compartments as fanatically as Orwell." 28

George Woodcock, a Canadian writer and scholar, also joined Orwell during the war while Orwell was at BBC. He too wrote about how Orwell was indifferent to friends and how he looked inclined to remain locked up in his own cell. In *Orwell Remembered* George Woodcock wrote to say:

"Apart from his accent, the only characteristic of the public school background that Orwell seemed to have retained was his emotional stoicism of behaviour." 29

He went on to say:

"Even his anger was demonstrated only on paper, and while his generosity and consideration for other people indicated the presence of deep feelings, he showed them rarely. He was certainly interested in women, but he never displayed the fact, and one unusually beautiful girl remarked to me that Orwell was the only one among her male acquaintances who never made her feel that he was aware of her as a woman" 30

30. Ibid. p. 204
The above statements of Symons and George Woodcock suggest that Orwell was a constitutionally lonely and indifferent man who perhaps enjoyed living in his private world.

Again Mr. Symons cites a very exciting example:

“One day I happened to mention Rayner Heppenstall’s name, I think to say that I had enjoyed his book satirine. I asked if Orwell like Heppenstall’s work. ‘Rayner and I have an agreement,’ he said. ‘I don’t read his books and he doesn’t read mine.’ It was not until I read Heppenstall’s articles in the Twentieth Century many years later that I had any idea of the length and luridness of their relationship. There was no reason why Orwell should have told me of it but most people would have been unable to resist saying something-some-times malicious, mysterious, forgiving or merely gossipy. The reticence was characteristically Orwellian, and so was the form of his answer.” 31

Orwell, however, had distinct and unique personal qualities and one of which Mr Symons admired very much, was ‘an utter lack of formality.’ 32 He was brutally frank, saying “always what was in his mind.” 33 He did not care to find out whether what he said would hurt the others’ feeling. He was making “no preliminary attempt to find out whether it ran counter to the ideas and prejudices of his companions,” 34 To affirm this let us quote again, Mr. Symons. He recalls how Orwell was once

31. Ibid p. 35
32. Ibid p. 37
33. Ibid p. 37
34. Ibid p. 37
“attacking the machinations of the Catholic church in the presence of an ardent Catholic who became increasingly fidgety and at last hysterically abusive” 35

One might even go as far as to interpret this unusual trait in Orwell as betraying a rather thick skin. Sometimes as we judged from the above incident, it might appear that he ‘lacks common sense which is so common, but perhaps that would not be quite fair to him. I would rather call him a “sharp instrument” that would kick sense into thick-skulls or dullards, naive people. Incidentally one is reminded of what God spoke of His merciful providence in regard to His Church through the prophet Isaiah:

“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold I will make thee “a new sharp instrument” having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff” 36

So Orwell became the conscience-keeper, the conscience-pricker, like a sharp threshing instrument. From the incident quoted and recalled by Symons, we can see that he was needling someone’s sensitive nerve. Here one recalls what certainly may have irritated the Catholic listener was Orwell’s “unwillingness to offence, his assumption that all sensible people must think as he did.” 37 In many ways he ever remained a gauch man. In a

35. Ibid p. 37
letter to Cyril Connolly he wrote: "You scratch my book, I'll scratch yours." Yet one good thing appears from this suggestion of his to his friend which is that he did not mind others to treat him as he treated them. And he was ready to fight or defend himself at any time. At least he was not a man to take things lying down. Besides he did not mind to be corrected by others if he made mistakes.

In his book *Orwell, A Reminiscence*, Julian Symons says that

"One couldn't meet Orwell without being aware that one is in the presence of a character, an original."  

George Orwell was indeed not a pretender nor artificial. He was not a person who would say one thing and practise another. We attempt to analyse some details about Orwell's unusual traits a little so as to be able to see more clearly this extraordinary man. Also this would, hopefully, enable us further to delve inside the interesting workshop of his mind.

"At this point what must be underlined is an important fact that most of the unusual traits had perhaps already taken root in him in his very early years."  

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38. Orwell's letter to Cyril Connolly, Dated 14.3.38, Published in Encounter, January 1962, p. 58
40. Ibid. p. 35
Now let us come to the question the other part of the study—whether his literary ambitions and practices, which he had started during boyhood had any formative influence on his art. We might like to suggest that Orwell was a born writer. Let us refer to his own statement in this regard:

"From a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I know that when I grew up I should be a writer." 41

‘Morning shows the day’ and it shows early in Orwell. It is unique and commendable indeed that he could discover his talent with “a facility of words so early.” 42 We know from his own record that the volume of seriously intended writing managed by him very early was not more than six or seven pages. When he was hardly five years old, his mother dictated his maiden poem. He recollects:

“I cannot remember anything about it except it was about a tiger and the tiger had chair-like teeth” - a good enough phrase, but I fancy the poem was a plagiarism of Blake’s ‘Tiger, Tiger’ 43

In any case it was quite unusual. When he was only eleven years old, he wrote the following patriotic poem:

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41. Orwell George, Why I Write (Collected Essays) 1961. p.435
42. Ibid. p. 435
43. Ibid. p. 435
AWAKE YOUNG MEN OF ENGLAND

Oh! give me the strength of the Lion
The wisdom of Reynard the Fox
And then I'll hurl troops at the Germans
And give them the hardest of knocks.

Oh! think of the War Lord's mailed fist,
That in striking at England today:
And think of the lives that our soldiers
Are fearlessly throwing away.

Awake! Oh young men of England,
For if when your country's in need,
You do not enlist by the thousand,
You truly are cowards indeed. 44

Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard published his poem promptly on 2nd October, 1914 because the First World War had broken out. He was at the boarding at that time. It was certain he did not reject the war. He made contribution for his England by calling young men of England to rise to the occasion. Again he wrote another poem on the death of Kitchener, the War Lord when the 'Hampshire' sank on his secret journey to Russia. The poem goes thus:

44. Crick Bernard, George Orwell, A Life (Penguin Books, 625 Medison Avenue, New York, U.S.A. (c) Benard Crick, 2980 p. 85
KITCHENER

No stone is set to mark his nation's loss
No stately tomb enshrines his noble breast;
Not e'en the tribute of a wooden cross
can mark his hero's rest.

He needs them not, his name untarnished stands,
Remindful of the mighty deeds he worked,
Footprints on one, upon time's changeful sands,
Who ne'er his duty shirked.

Who follows in his steps no danger shuns,
Nor stoops to conquer by shameful deed,
An honest and and (sic) unselfish race he runs,
From fear and malice freed. 45

It was quite commendable for a mere youth to be aware of the death
and sacrifice of a war hero. Perhaps Orwell's mental age had quite advanced
for his age. His sister Arvil recalled regarding his 1914 poem that it :

".....was at the beginning of the First World War, in fact I think
it was actually the day war broke out and he would have been
about eleven then and I suppose I was six and he was sitting
cross - legged on the floor of my mother's bedroom talking
about it in a grown-up manner and I was knitting him a school
scarf ...." 46

After the patriotic poem and elegy in Kitchener, Orwell attempted a
few nature poems. He made a couple of attempts at story writing too, but
they were failures. In his own words :

45. Ibid. p. 87
46. Ibid. p. 88
“That was the total of the could be serious work that I would actually set down on paper during all those years” ...... However, throughout this time I did in a sense engage in literary activities. To begin with, there was a made-to-order stuff which I produced quickly, easily and without much pleasure to myself. Apart from school work, I wrote verse d’occasion, semi-comic poems which I could turn out at what now seems to me astonishing speed—at fourteen I wrote a whole rhyming play, in imitation of Aristophanes, in about a week—and helped to edit school magazines, both printed and in manuscript. These magazines were the most pitiful burlesque stuff that you could imagine and I took far less trouble with them than I now would with the cheapest journalism.” 47

According to him H.G. Wells was one of the early literary figures who exerted same formative influence on him. He recalled this fact in a letter to Cyril Connolly that at “certain points their literary development impinged” and in the same letter he continued to remind his friend to go down memory lane at St. Cyprian with the following:

“Do you remember one or other of us getting hold of H.G. Wells ‘Country of the Blind’ about 1914, at St. Cyprian, and being so enthralled with it that we were constantly pinching it off each other? It’s very vivid memory of mine, stealing along the corridor at about four O’clock on a midsummer morning into the dormitory where you slept and pinching the book from besides your bed. And do you remember at about the same time my bringing back to school a copy of Compton Mackenzie’s ‘Sinister Street,’ which you began to read ...........and there was a fearful row about bringing ‘a book of that kind’ (though at that time I didn’t even know what ‘sinister’ meant) into the school.” 48

Mr. Bowling, the protagonist of George Orwell's novel, *Coming up for Air* simply reflected his creator's idea in revealing to us as to which author made the most impression on him:

"Wells was the author who made the biggest impression on me." 49

Mr. Wyndham Lewis also remarked that Orwell was definitely influenced by Wells. He wrote:

"It was evidently Orwell's idea (for he, like Mr. Bowling had been greatly influenced by Wells) to fashion his hero after a Wellesque pattern." 50

But it may be helpful to go back to the early years of Orwell to know some of these later literary influences he came under. In his boyhood recollection Orwell himself stated in 'Why I Write' how he was attempting literary exercises:

"...... I was carrying out a literary exercise of a quite different kind: this was the making up of a continuous 'story' about myself, a sort of diary existing only in the mind. I believe this is a common habit of children and adolescents. As a very small child I used to imagine that I was, say, Robin Hood, and picture myself as the hero of thrilling adventures, but quite soon my 'story' ceased to be narcissistic in a crude way and became more and more a mere description of what I was doing and the things I saw. For minutes at a time this kind of thing would be running

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through my head: 'He pushed the door open and entered the room. A yellow beam of sunlight, filtering through the muslin curtains, slanted on the table, where a match box, half open, lay beside the inkpot. With his right hand in his pocket he moved across to the window. Down in the street a tortoise shell cat was chasing a dead leaf,' etc. This habit continued till I was about twenty-five, right through my non-literary years. Although I had to search, and did search, for the right words. I seemed to be making this descriptive effort almost against my will, under a kind of compulsion from outside. The 'story must, I suppose, have reflected the style of the various writers I admired at different ages, but so far as I remember it always had the same meticulous descriptive quality.'

The above statements of Orwell indicate that at a remarkably early age there was a formation of literary forte in him. In the same book he said that at the age of sixteen he fell in love with words:

"When I was about sixteen I suddenly discovered the joy of mere words, i.e., the sounds and association of words."  

Orwell quite early in boyhood seems to have developed a feeling for words and sounds. He stated that words made him shiver down his spines. The lines from 'Paradise Lost' made him extremely happy and created a sensation to him. The lines are:

"So hee with difficulty and labour hard Moved on : with difficulty and labour hee" which do not seem to me so very wonderful, sent shivers down my backbone; and the spelling 'hee' for 'he' was an added pleasure."  

52. Ibid. p.8
53. Ibid. p.8
The most important phase in the formative years of George Orwell was the years he spent at Cyprian, a preparatory school at Eton. In a study of Orwell, the main hurdle is the difficulty of finding enough biographical material. In the beginning of this chapter we have made mention of two of his autobiographical books *Such, Such were the Joys* and the second part of *The Road To Wigan Pier*. Besides this we have something to refer to from a part of Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise*. Orwell spent four years at a preparatory boarding school in 1911 on the South Coast. He was eight years already at the time of his admission. Though his parents were not very wealthy, they had to keep up appearances which was not much endorsed by the original, transparent Orwell. His parents had an element of snobbishness which Orwell attributed to the 'typical shabby-genteel' families of the day. According to Orwell,

"A shabby-genteel family is in much the same position as a family of 'poor whites' living in a street where everyone else is a Negro."  

It was quite an achievement for the parents of Orwell to have sent their son to a boarding school despite their financial standing. And it was quite a privilege for Orwell to rub shoulders with the children of rich people, and so he ought to have felt grateful for it. But on the contrary throughout his life Orwell had been haunted by a sense of guilt complex because of his expensive education made through the self-sacrifice of his parents. Orwell

described the preparatory school days as Crossgates. Unlike himself, most of the pupils at Crossgates were the sons of rich parents. Like the hero of *Keep The Aspidistra Flying*, Gordon Comstock, Orwell was ceaselessly chased by agonising sense that he was a misfit, just like a fish out of water. He has given a graphic account of this snobbish school without mincing words:

“Crossgates was an expensive snobbish school which was in the process of becoming more snobbish, and I imagine more expensive. The Public School with which it had special connections was Harrow, but during my time an increasing proportion of the boys went on to Eton. Most of them were the children of rich parents, but on the whole they were the unaristocratic rich, the sort of people who live in huge shrubberied houses in Bournemouth or Richmond, and who have cars and butlers but not country estate. There were a few exotics among them—some such American boys, sons of Argentine beef barons, one or two Russians, and even a Siamese prince, or someone who was described as a prince.”  

Orwell felt strongly that he was the odd boy out and felt that he could never be at the same level with the other rich boys because his parents were not rich. To add salt to injury the Headmaster Mr. Wilkes revealed to Eric that “he was on reduced fees by saying (‘you are living on my bounty’) to spur him to work harder for a good scholarship; and second, he told him that if he didn’t win this scholarship, he must leave the school at 14 ‘and become,

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55. Christopher Hollis, *A Study of George Orwell* p. 2  
56. Crick Bernard, *George Orwell, A Life* (Secker & Warburg Ltd. 1980) p. 74
in Sambo’s favourite phrase, “a little office boy at forty pounds a year” - the ultimate horror of falling among the poverty-stricken genteel world of Gordon Comstock and his sister indeed! 56 Besides the Headmaster’s wife whom the boys called ‘Bingo’ made Crossgates appear to Orwell like hell itself because of her callousness and whimsicality. She was the final authority at Crossgates according to Orwell. To take Orwell’s own words:

“I think everybody in the school hated her ....... she was frankly capricious. There were days when everyone cowered before those deepest, accusing eyes and there were days when she was like a flirtatious queen surrounded by courtiers --lovers, laughing and joking, scattering largesse, or the promise of largesse......A word we all constantly used in speaking Bingo was “favours.” “I am in good favour.” We would say, or “I’m in bad favour.” Except for the handful of wealthy or titled boys, no one was permanently in good favour, but on the other hand even the outcasts had patches of it from time to time. Thus although my memories of Bingo are mostly hostile, I also remember considerable periods when I basked under her smiles, when she called me ‘Old Chap’ and used my Christian name, and allowed me to frequent her private library, where I first made acquaintance with ‘Vanity Fair.’ The high-water mark of good favour was to be invited to serve at table on Sunday nights when Bingo and Sim had guests to dinner ... at the first smile one’s hatred turned into a sort of winging love.” 57

May be, the ambition of the couple at Crossgates was to attract boys from good financial backgrounds and second, to win scholarships at public schools and Eton could be the first choice. The real basis for the relationship of the boys with Sim and Bingo (Sim for the headmaster Wikes) was mainly financial. Again Orwell remarks:

57. Orwell George, Such, Such Were the Jays p. 438
"Our brains were a gold-mine in which he (Mr. Wilkee) had sunk money, and the dividends must be squeezed out of us."

Though they were intelligent and clever, the poorer boys were always reminded of their poverty. At times and again they were strictly reminded that they could not afford to live like the rich boys. Orwell recalled painfully:

"The poorer boys were discouraged from going in for 'extra' such as shooting and carpentry, and were humiliated over clothes and petty possessions. I never, for instance, succeeded in getting a cricket bat of my own, because 'your parents wouldn't be able to afford it.' The phrase pursued me throughout school days."  

Orwell then continues to tell us that the boys were not allowed to keep the money they brought with them from home. This rule was one of the odd practices at Crossgates. They had to surrender all their money at the beginning of the term, they were only allowed to draw their pocket money under the strict supervision of the two absolute powers of Crossgate, Sim and Bingo. Their pocket money was left sharply graded according to their status. Orwell disclosed:

"The millionaires had six pence a week, but the normal sum was three pence. I and the other two or three others were only allowed two pence. My parents had not given instruction to this effect, and the saving of a penny a week could conceivably have made any difference to them; it was a mark of status."  

58. Brackets mine  
59. Orwell George, *Such, Such were the Joys* p. 427  
60. Ibid. p. 428  
61. Ibid. p. 428
There were, it appears, two reasons behind the discrimination. According to George Orwell the first reason was to keep the poorer boys in their proper places, and the second is to develop a humble outlook in the minds of the poorer ones. Orwell was very bitter about it. He dejectedly remarks:

"Bingo, in particular, seemed to aim consciously at inculcating a humble outlook in the poorer boys. 'Do you think that’s the sort of thing a boy like you should buy?' I remember her saying to somebody—and she said this in front of the whole school: 'you know your not going to grow up with money, don’t you? Your parents aren’t rich. You must learn to be sensible. Don’t get above yourself.'" 62

Birthdays marked a climax for the poorer children. The parents of the rich boys used to send special ice-cakes for their respective boys. But to Orwell, sensitive nerves sent a shiver, giving him a strong sense of shame and fear. His own frank notation is as follows:

"It was unusual for each boy, on his birthday, to have large iced cakes with candles, which was shared out at tea between the whole school. It was provided as a matter of routine and went on his parents’ bill. I never had such a cake, though my parents would have paid it readily enough. Year after year, never daring to ask, I would miserably hope that this year a cake would appear. Once or twice I even rashly pretended to my companions that this time I was going to have a cake, which did not make me more popular." 63

62. Ibid. p. 428
63. Ibid. p. 428
Now for a boy as sensitive as Orwell, the non-appearance of cakes on birthdays meant so much. Mr. Atkins writes about the hurt feeling of Orwell:

“He (Eric Blair) says his popularity was not increased by the non-appearance of the cake. To the other boys it seemed to be a case of petty swindling. Orwell suffered not only from the malice of Bingo but from the unthinking censure of the boys, who are traditionally incapable of such situations.”

Incidentally, it may be noted that the hero of *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* Gordon also had a more or less similar background. He writes:

“They soon found out his poverty, of course, and gave him hell because of it. Probably the greatest cruelty one can inflict on a child is to send it to a school among children richer than itself. A child conscious of poverty will suffer snobbish agonies such as grown-up persons scarcely even imagines.”

Besides developing an inferiority complex, suffering snobbish agonies and the like, a child sent to a school where life had to be lived among boys much richer also will develop hatred for its own parents. As poor boys were taken for granted at Crossgates in the form of not making ice-cakes appear, the poor boys in turn can take the folks for granted—with the exception of Orwell who was very intelligent, sensitive, and conscious of his parents’ great sacrifice for his education.

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64. Brackets mine.
65. John Atkins, *George Orwell* pp. 35-6
66. Orwell George, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 46
Dr. S.N. Prasad comments on *Keep The Aspindra Flying* in connection with George Orwell’s acute consciousness of poverty which was embedded in a corner of his mind:

"Considering that this novel was written when Orwell was in the thirties, we can easily imagine how his experience at Crossgates had burnt into his consciousness. At Crossgates, it was not Bingo alone who hounded him: in fact, he was constantly reminded of his penury by the large army of the rich and titled boys." 67

To support the above facts, let us quote from the conversation of Orwell and a Russian boy at Crossgates. The Russian boy inquired of Orwell how much money he made in a year. Orwell replied by adding a few hundreds to his rough estimates of his father’s income; to which the Russian hastily did some calculation and boasted:

"My father has over two hundred times as much money as yours." 68

Such and others similar questions were often asked at Crossgates. The sons of poorer parents were subjected to embarrassing questions by the little brats of the rich. They took every chance to make the poorer boys feel small Orwell’s own record is revealing:

68. Orwell George, *Such, Such were The Joys*. p. 452
"the questions that new boys of doubtful social origin were sometimes put through-questioning quite surprising in their mean-minded particularity, when one reflects that the inquisitors were only twelve or thirteen." 69

Orwell also narrated another incident in which a boy of not more than eight years old was subjected to a severe scrutiny. The boy painfully made an abortive attempt to fit into the right class. The interview was conducted as -

"Have your people got a car? 'Yes' "What sort of car?" "Daimler" "How many horse power?" (Pause and leap in the dark) "Fifteen" "What kind of light? Electric or Acetylene?" (A longer pause, and another leap in the dark:) "Acetylene" "Coo! He says his pater's cars' got Acetylene lamps. They went out years ago. It must be as old as the hills." Rot! He's making it up. He hasn't got a car. He's just a navvy. Your pater's a navvy" And so on." 70

On looking back Orwell could perceive more clearly in the rich boys' pursuit of various practices clear marks of snobbery. They pursued them very very wickedly, intimately and intelligently. They revelled in the snobbish methods not caring at all for the hurt emotions of those poor boys who were at the receiving end. These little snobs used to indulge at the beginning and at the end of the term in a whole series of magic phrases. This snobbish attitude, Orwell writes, may have sprung from "the pretended belief

69. Ibid. p. 446
70. Ibid. p. 446
in Scottish superiority.” 71 "Scotland was a private place which a few initiates could talk about and made outsiders feel small.” 72 In order to convey his sense of this snobbery prevailing at Crossgates, Orwell writes -

“There never was I suppose, in the history of the world a time when the sheer vulgar fatness of wealth, without any kind of aristocratic elegance to redeem it was obtrusive as in those years before 1914 ... The extraordinary thing was the way in which everyone took it for granted that this oozing, bulging wealth of the English upper and upper-middle classes would last forever, and was part of the order of things. After 1918 it was never quite the same again. Snobbishness and expensive habits came back, certainly, but they were self conscious and on the defensive. Before the war the worship of money was entirely unreflecting and untroubled by any pang of conscience. The goodness of money was as unmistakable as the goodness of health or beauty, and a glittering car, a title or a horde of servants was mixed up in people’s minds with the idea of moral virtues.” 73

Now if money was to be equated with ‘goodness,’ Orwell found it impossible for himself to be good. This feeling took root in him and he recollects with a touch of self-pity:

"..... all the different kinds of virtue seem to be mysteriously interconnected and to belong to much the same people. It was not only money that mattered : these were also strength, beauty, charm, athleticism, and something called ‘guts’ or ‘character,’ which in reality meant the power to impose your will on the others. I did not possess any of these qualities.” 74

71. Ibid. p. 445
72. Ibid. p. 446
73. Ibid. pp. 444-5
74. Ibid. pp. 446-7
At Crossgates, Orwell found himself dwarfed by the majority of boys who were demoralisingly rich. He felt very depressed and felt very small before what he called "the armies of the unalterable laws." According to his own record, these armies (the rich) included "the school masters with their canes, the millionaires with their Scottish Castles, the athletes with their curly hair ...." 76

In this regard, the following remark is worth quoting:

"In this way he was awed into a grim realisation of his own unequal status. He found himself damned according to the prevalent "law"-a fact which indicates at that tender age had been planted in his heart the painful conviction of failure and futility." 77

It appears that ignorance became his strength. Before a realisation dawned on him that he was poor, he was strong. Now his strength became his weakness. St. Paul of Tarsus in the beginning of the first century wrote to the Corinthians. Corinthians worshipped money and the kinky things it could buy. Money flowed freely, because Corinth straddled one of the Roman empire's most vital trade routes. The city was a sprawling open-air market filled with slaves, Orientals, Jews, Greeks, Egyptians, Sailors, athletes, gamblers, and charioteers. Apostle Paul writes to them:

75. Ibid. p.448
76. Ibid. p.448
77. The Student Bible Copyright © 1986. (by the Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1986) p. 1000
"We are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised."

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;

And labour, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

Being defamed, we intreat: We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." 78

The account of St. Paul made above and the account Orwell gave have certain marked similarities. In both there is a touch of pathos. Orwell writes:

"I had no money, I was weak, I was ugly, I was unpopular, I had a chronic cough, I was cowardly, I smelt ...... The conviction that it was not possible for me to be a success went deep enough to influence my actions till far into adult life. Until I was thirty I always planned my life on the assumption not only that any major undertaking was bound to fail, but that I could only expect to live a few years longer." 79

Putting aside all the other negative nouns and adjectives Orwell attributed to himself, let us take one of his complaints 'ugly' for a clear scrutiny. In Orwell Remembered Rayner Heppenstall describes Orwell as a tall, (six feet three inches) 80 big headed man, with pale blue, defensive humorous eyes, a little moustache and painfully snickering laugh". 81

79. Orwell George, Such, Such were The Joys, p. 448
80. Brackets mine.
81. Audrey Coppard & Bernard Crek, Orwell Remembered London 1984, p. 107
Woodcock who met him during the war while Orwell was at BBC described him as ..... a tall and angular man, with a worn Gothic face that was elongated by vertical furrows at the corners of the mouth. His rather narrow upper lip was adorned by a thin line of moustache, and the general gauntness of his looks was accentuated by the deep sockets from which his eyes looked out sadly.  

Well if all the above qualifications were the signs of ugliness, Orwell must have been ugly. But none of the ten ladies who had met him and wrote about Orwell in "Orwell Remembered" have branded him as ugly or handsome: George Woodcock compared him with 'Don Quixote without horse and his drooping whiskers," 83 to get a fair idea of what George Orwell looked like." 84 Orwell writes about himself in 'Such, Such Were The Joys':

"Until after I had left school for good, I continued to believe that, I was preter-naturally ugly. It was what my school fellows told me and I had no other authority to refer to." 85

Orwell's self-derogatory remarks may appear difficult to believe on seeing his childhood photographs from between 6 & 7 of List of Illustrations of childhood, no. 5. 'Eric Blair aged 14' & no. 16. Eric Blair, 1921. In these two snaps, he was quite 'cute' and handsome. On this we would do well to hear the description of Christopher Hollis, who first negated Orwell’s complaint;  

82. Ibid. p. 199   
83. Ibid. p. 199   
84. Ibid. p. 199   
85. Orwell George, Such, Such were the Joys p. 448
"It was not in the least my memory of him as a school boy... that he was ugly, ... and I received only the other day a striking confirmation that my memory was just. I happened to give a talk on Orwell on the Wireless, and it was listened to by a friend of mine who had been an Oppidan at Eton at the time that Orwell and I were in college. This friend had never connected the Orwell whom he read later life with the Blair whom he had known at school. 'Oh, Yes,' he said to me, 'Blair.' I remembered him well. A tall good looking chap, wasn't he?" 87

In connection with this we may quote the other writer Kenneth Allsop, 87 He makes incidental reference to Orwell's appearance and compares him with Ignazio Silone. He writes:

87. Christopher Hollis A Study of George Orwell (Hollis and Carter, London 1950) p. 9
"Into the cool dusk of the apartment drawing room—the wooden shutters are already closed against the baking sun-glare of morning in the Rome suburb—comes Ignazio Silone, and for an eerie moment one imagines it is George Orwell who has entered. The body, in the lightweight pale suit and opened-necked white shirt, knottily thickset and quite unlike Orwell's tubercular gauntness. Yet it is a brother's face elongated and high-domed; dark, greying hair fingercombed straight back; even the thin bristle of moustache. Yet more marked is the resemblance of the battered, lined melancholy, a haggard reflection sombreness that is occasionally dispelled by a sudden radiant smile—perhaps this is the face of the thirties." 88

Mr. Allsop is not suggesting that Orwell's was an ugly face. Mr. Atkins says that "Not many years later, Sir Richard Rees regarded Orwell as a good looking young man." 89 Yet, as Mr. Hollis very rightly contends, Orwell's essay, Such, Such Were the Joys is valuable mainly for its philosophical reflections. Orwells own remark is significant. He writes:

"a child's belief of its own shortcoming is not much influenced by facts" 90

Orwell's belief is that even if you have all the "gifts of God" other than money, you are doomed to suffer for want of it, and cry in bitterness. He himself had cried at Crossgated, and his stay there must have endangered this belief in him. In Keep the Aspidistra Flying, the hero of his novel Gordon Comstock cried while surveying the wall of books:

88 Kenneth Allsop, Ignazio Silone, Encounter Mare! 1962, p. 29
89 John Atkins George Orwell, John and Calder, London p. 40
90 George Orwell, Such, Such were The Joys p. 448
"Give me not righteousness O Lord. give me money, only money." 91

Now some people have tried to trace the roots of Orwell's hatred of his schoolmates in his inherent deficiency in personal relationships and in his leading a solitary life from a very tender age. Orwell's personal relationships were evidently beyond his grasp right from the beginning. He was a solitary by nature. But for the sake of maintaining a proper perspective, we must closely scrutinise Orwell's accusations levelled against Crossgates and other's accusation levelled against Orwell for such accusations. Mr. Christopher Hollis writes:

"From Connolly's pages, written before Such, Such were the Joys, we should get the impression that the school did, indeed suffer from the faults from which most fashionable private schools suffered at that time and that Mr. and Mrs. Simpson were indeed snobs, though not snobs of so outstanding a beastliness as well as should guess from Orwell. Indeed, where Orwell speaks of Mr. Simpson as detestably indifferent to any intellectual distinction or to any values except the values of snobbery. Mr. Connolly tells the story how he revisited the school after leaving Eton and before going up to Oxford and how Mrs. Simpson, with some simplicity of mind, told him that a Balliol scholar has the ball at his feet." 92

The contrast between the accounts of Crossgates by Orwell and Connolly is striking. Connolly's approach is so different from Orwell's that:

"An account of the one does little either to confirm or refute that of the other." 93

91. George Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying p. 13
92. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 3
93. Ibid. p. 3
In *Enemies of Promise* entitled *A Georgian Boyhood* Mr. Connolly has left a faithful "account of the splendours and miseries of adolescence." 94

Mr. Gavin Ewart continues that "it is probably of most interest for the facts it gives us about Orwell-one of the most fascinating figures of the half century." 95

Again, in a concentrated study of Orwell's mind and art, the writer makes a perceptive observation:

"I tend to believe that there is surely some merit in attributing the unusualness of Orwell's experiences at the Preparatory Schools to his unusual nature. Nor can we very reasonably challenge the veracity of Mr. Connolly's account. In fact, what is striking here is not so much that they gave us different accounts as that they themselves were different persons. It appears (at least to me) that personal relationships were not difficult for Mr. Connolly even in his boyhood. He could easily develop associations with the other boys of the school, and what is more, his relations with them were much more important than those he could establish with his teachers." 96

But it was different with Orwell. Bingo was the villain of the piece; the boys were more or less minor figures. Mr. Hollis has made a pointed remark when he writes:

95 Ibid. p. 41
“Orwell, on the other hand, gives no indication whether he liked or disliked the boys who appear fitfully in his essay-save only one, Johnny Hall, who used to bully him and whom he personally disliked. Even Hall is only brought in to illustrate an anecdote. Orwell’s sole concern with the other boys is to record the details of their fate and to argue whether it was just or unjust. His interest is in the Headmaster and his wife, the peculiar nature of his relationship with them and the moral problem which that relationship posed.” 97

According to both Orwell and Connolly, caning and flogging were ruthless and frequently resorted to at Crossgates by the headmaster Sim. Both of them have registered their bitter protest against corporal punishment. Mr. Connolly remembers Sim as 'a monster rushing towards with cane, his face upside down and distorted' 98 a portrait which Mr. Hollis commends as "somewhat overdrawn." 99

Orwell too describes in almost similar picture as Hollis. He writes:

"... the double beating was a turning point, for it brought home to me for the first time the harshness of the environment into which I had been flung. Life was more terrible .... than I had imagined.” 100

To Mr. Hollis, the beatings were 'torture' and he simply abhorred the practice. But Orwell had very strange reactions. He records the first beating as follows:

97. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 3
98. Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise, also quoted by C. Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 3
99. C. Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 3
The beating did not hurt .... and I walked out feeling very much better. The fact that beating had not hurt was a sort of victory and partially wiped out the shame of bed - wetting. I was even incautious enough to wear a grin on my face." 101

Let us put beside Orwell's own comments a friend's observation:

Mr. Hollis gives his comment:

"Orwell's objection to corporal punishment had nothing to do with its painfulness. Indeed he is careful to point out of his beating that it did not hurt at all and, when, because he boasted of this, he was dragged back and beaten a second time .... even then he insists that it did not actually hurt and that he cried, not out of pain, but out of remorse. There was a trait in Orwell's character which drove him on to accept unpleasant experiences in order to prove himself that he could take it." 102

This bent of mind which had been sown in Eric's nascent mind at a very young age came to a full development in the adult Orwell who emerged as a

"practitioner of voluntarily contrived down-and outery....turned his face upon Eton upbringing and for a while shared the life of unfortunates described in his 'Down and Out in Paris and London'" 103

100. George Orwell, Such, Such were the Joys p. 422
101. Ibid. 422
Manifestly, the same force must have been at work when, at a later stage, he joined the militia during the Spanish Revolution. Orwell was at all stages repulsed by inhuman practice in any form, at any level, chiefly by the obscenity of it. Mr. Hollis writes:

"Like Macaulay's Puritan with bear-baiting, he objected to it, not because it gave pain to the boy, but because it gave pleasure to the master—a very reasonable objection but not at all point that especially troubled Mr. Connolly's more fragile bottom." 104

It appears that Orwell exerted great influence on Mr. Connolly as the latter wrote of Orwell as of one whom he truly revered. Mr. Atkins says that Orwell proved to Connolly

"that there existed an alternative to character namely Intelligence, just as another contemporary Cecil Beaton added sensibility." 105

Mr. Connolly pointedly remarked:

"The remarkable thing about Orwell was that he alone among the boys was intellectual, and not a parrot, for he thought for himself, read Shaw and Samuel Butler, and rejected not only Wulfric's, but the war, the Empire, Kipling, Sussex and Character. I remember a moment under a fig-tree in one of the inland boulevards of the seaside town, Orwell standing beside

105. John Atkins, *George Orwell* p. 41
me, and saying in his flat, ageless voice: 'You know Connolly, there's only one remedy for all disease.' I felt the usual tremor when sex was mentioned and hazarded, 'You mean going to the lavatory?' 'No—I mean Death!'  

To Mr. Connolly, Orwell at Crossgates appeared as a true rebel. And according to his own estimate he himself was a rebel at that stage. Orwell is remembered by Mr. Connolly as

"tall, pale, with his placid cheeks, a matter-of-fact, supercilious voice, he was one of those boys who seem born old. He was incapable of courtship and when his favour went it went for ever. He went through St. Wulfric's despised Sambo and hated Flip, but was valuable to them as scholarship fodder."  

Another schoolmate also remembered Orwell's distinction from the rest:

"Orwell wasn't like a boy, and he didn't think like a boy. Whereas most boys expect favouritism to be a matter of good looks, athletic success or good nature-Orwell always regarded it as based on money."  

Let us now consider another parallel between Orwell and Mr. Hollis. In course of his study of Orwell, Mr. Hollis says,

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106 Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise, George Orwell pp. 41-42
107 Ibid p. 41
"... my own experience of preparatory school life was both so strikingly similar to and so strikingly different from that of Orwell that it is worth-while setting the two side by side." 109

Both Orwell and Hollis were born of poor parents. But Mr. Hollis asserts that he was not at all taken cheap by the headmaster. Besides he did not feel that he was looked upon as mere 'scholarship fodder' as Orwell unfortunately felt. According to Mr. Hollis, his headmaster Dr. Williams was

"in many ways a frightening and unbending man. Yet the major accusations which Orwell brings against Mr. Simpson would have been incredible if brought against Dr. Williams by his bitterest enemy. .... So far from throwing up us charity to me, at a moment of rebuke or punishment, he never referred to it directly or indirectly, all the time that I was at Summer Fields or even afterwards until his death. Indeed it was only through an incautious remark of my mother a year or two after I had gone to Summer Fields that I learnt that Dr. Williams was the anonymous benefactor who was saving my father from school fees that he would never have been able to pay. As far as I am aware, Dr. Williams never knew that I had been told the secret." 110

Mr. Hollis was quite fortunate in having gone to Summer Fields and not to Crossgates. To him poverty was not as embarrassing as Orwell. As for Orwell, his bitterness at being grossly discriminated against at Crossgates was welling within him from day to day. Perhaps the poverty complex was taking root in him even at a tender age, if he had gone to Summer Fields and not to

109. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell. p. 4
110. Ibid p. 5
Crossgates, he might even be cured of this hang-over if at all it had developed early in life. His main suffering indeed came from the extreme inner tension which he felt at the preparatory schools. He had a dogged determination on his part to keep his individuality intact against the hostile local surroundings governed by the rich and the strong. He himself said,

"I am anxious to make it clear that I was not a rebel, except by force of circumstances." 111

One would perhaps be readily in agreement with Mr. Atkins in regard to the above statement of Orwell. Atkins revealingly remarks that Orwell

"at his preparatory school was always in the wrong, not for any transgression but simply because he was himself." 112

It was his integrity, innate in him, which must have led him to reflect thus:

"I had nothing to help me except my dumb selfishness, my inability-not, indeed, to despise myself, but to dislike myself-my instinct to survive." 113

111. George Orwell Such, Such were the Joys, p. 438
113. George Orwell, Such, Such were the Joys, p. 450
At this stage now, it seems, that we are in a position to sum up the facts concerning the formative years of Orwell at his Preparatory School. One may perhaps be able to say the charge against Orwell that most of his complaints were the figment of a troubled imagination cannot be conclusively proved. With regard to the possible formative influence of the preparatory school, it is mainly that he left the school, deeply scarred, with a conviction of a failure. He could not recover from these influences till late in life when he was grown up. His sense of impending doom and failure is reflected in an account of the parting scene from the school. Orwell writes:

"... there was a sort of patronage, almost a sneer in her face in her voice... "Good bye," Bingo’s parting smile seemed to say: "It’s not worth quarrelling. You haven’t made much of a success of our time at Crossgates, have you? And I don’t suppose you’ll get on awfully well at a public school either. We made a mistake, really, in wasting out time and money on you. This kind of education hasn’t much to offer to a boy with your background and outlook .... Let’s just admit that you’re one of our own failures and part without ill-feeling."" ¹¹⁴

Whether Orwell parted without ill-feeling we are not very sure. But from the following record of Orwell, we know that this (ill-feeling) ¹¹⁵ was not the over-riding feeling in him. He records:

«... I well remember the feeling...»

¹¹⁴. Ibid. p. 451
¹¹⁵. Brackets mine.
Or again,

"... how happy I was ... The world was opening before me, just a little, like grey sky which exhibits a narrow crack of blue."

Obviously, with a deep-set conviction of failure, Orwell left Crossgates. But no amount of depression and bitterness could prevent him from winning the desired scholarship emphatically. He won not only one, but two scholarships—one at Eton and the other to Wellington.

We may now turn to another phase—Orwell at Eton. Even while at Crossgates, Orwell had seen fanciful visions of the kind of life that he might come to experience at a public school very soon. He writes:

"At Eton you had a room to yourself—a room which might even have a fire in it. At Wellington you had your own cubicle, and could make Cocoa in the evenings. The privacy of it, the grown-upness. And there would be libraries to hang about in, and summer afternoons when you could skirk games and mooch about the countrysides alone, with no master driving you along. There was time for a bit of happiness before the future closed in upon me."

Orwell could foresee that a public school promised "A little quietude, a little of self-indulgence, a little respite from cramming" and would perhaps, "be better fun than Crossgates." He was bitten once by horrible
and bitter experiences already to fall into the trap of any illusion about the approaching days. On the contrary, he apprehended that a public school also would be "at bottom equally alien."\textsuperscript{121} He also knew that "In a world where the prime necessities were money, titled relatives, athleticism, tailor-made, clothes, a neatly brushed hair, a charming smile, I was no good."\textsuperscript{122} All this without any doubt originates from a premonition about a dark future—a premonition which he was seized with very early, at Crossgates. So, as he went to Eton, he carried away from the previous school "The deepest conviction"\textsuperscript{123} that "the future was dark. Failure, failure behind me, failure ahead of me."\textsuperscript{124}

At this point, we have to face squarely two main questions. Firstly, did Orwell enjoy his life at Eton? Secondly, did Eton have an appreciable formative influence on him? Before we deal with the answers, let us consider another student's impression of Eton, (for example, Mr. Connolly,)

Mr. Connolly writes:

"Were I to deduce anything from my feelings on leaving Eton, it might be called the theory of Permanent Adolescence. It is the theory that experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools are no intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development."\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid. p. 451
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid. p. 451
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid. p. 452
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid. p. 452
\textsuperscript{125} Cyril Connolly, \textit{Enemies of Promise}, Boston 1959, also quoted by Christopher Hollis, \textit{A Study of George Orwell}. p. 11
We can easily see from the above impressions that Mr. Connolly's attitude is of a typical Etonian. In his opinion, an Eton career is very likely to make a permanent formative influence—a point which provoked Orwell to comment:

"When you read the second sentence in this passage, your natural impulse is to look for the misprint. Presumably there is a 'not' left out, or something. But no, not a bit of it! He means it! And what is more, he is merely speaking the truth, in an inverted fashion. 'Cultured' middle-class life had reached the depth of softness at which a public school education—five years in a lukewarm bath of snobbery—can actually be looked back upon as eventful period." 126

Here it must be remembered that Mr. Connolly had enjoyed his life at Eton. Mr. Hollis also endorses it:

"Mr. Connolly was certainly not one who found nothing to complain of in his Eton life and a superficial critic might say that he was certainly not one who remembered it because it was pleasant. In the latter judgement the critic would, I think, be wrong. Although Mr. Connolly's story is in large part the story of a battle, it was a battle which, as he himself would confess, he greatly enjoyed." 127

To a certain point, Mr. Hollis' argument is tenable, but, we must ask how well it would help us assess Orwell's reactions to his own Etonian career. In fact, even at his public school, some of Orwell's basic problems remained unsolved. First and foremost his lack of money. George Bott remarked, with reference to the years Orwell spent at Eton.

126. George Orwell, Inside the Whale. Collected Essays. p. 147
127. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell. p. 11
"The demon of the empty purse was still gnawing at him ...."  

Nevertheless, it may affect that Orwell must have found the life at Eton comparatively tolerable. No wonder he wrote very few things about Eton as compared to the long essay he wrote on Crossgates. Perhaps, Orwell would have gladly allowed the school the credit of being a fairly enjoyable one, only if it did not choose to interfere with his freedom. Eton happened to be such a school for him. At the same time it may be said that bitter memories stay longer in one's mind strongly and clearly than happy ones. In connection with this, Mr. Hollis observes:

"Nor, though it may be a general truth that the mind retains that which it has most enjoyed, it is universally true that those remember their school days best who enjoyed them most. The retentive mind of Sir Charles Oman held to the last, as he showed in his 'Memories of Victorian Oxford,' every detail of the ill-treatment which he had received at Winchester half a century before, and Bismark in his retirement lay awake, hating the schoolmaster of his youth." 129

This explains why Orwell did not feel like submitting his life at Eton to a detailed discussion as he treated his memories of the preparatory school. I take it that as a researcher searching Orwell's mind that at Eton Orwell had certainly gained a breathing space. And this brings us to the other question already raised earlier-whether Eton had any visible formative influence in Orwell's life. Obviously the answer should be Yes. But Orwell himself had come to realise that this was not so.

128. George Bott, Introduction to George Orwell: Selected Writings, 1988, p. 5
129. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 11
"I did not work there, and learned very little and I don't feel that Eton has been much of a formative influence in my life." ¹³⁰

One of his critics, Tom Hopkinson, commenting on the above remark says:

"There is, in my opinion, 'a non sequitur' in those few lines. The fact that Orwell did little work at Eton may have been a sign of influence, rather than a lack of it. Many young Englishmen 'do not work' at their Universities, but acquire a broadening mind to solve complex problems which is far more valuable than academic learning. Orwell certainly acquired these gifts from somewhere. Eton, in its tolerant attitude towards the individual and its appreciation of intellectual freedom, is much more like a university than a school and probably deserves more credit than he gave it. Most other schools would have got rid of a boy who, holding a scholarship, chose to do no work." ¹³¹

Laurence Brander too gives a parallel comment to refute Orwell's complaint that he did not benefit much from Eton. He observes:

"That sounds like the wishful thinking of the preacher of the classes society, and to anyone who knew him it was obvious where he had been to school. A boy must go to school somewhere and if he needed rest after cramming, Eton was probably the ideal place. He would be likely to absorb more than anyone else restfully. It should be noted that this slacking was comparative. He held his place half-way up a form of scholarship boys. But he maintained that he enjoyed his leisure for quite a time. 'Between the ages of thirteen and twenty two or three, I hardly ever did a stroke of avoidable work.' This amounted to a ten-year slack in Eton and the East, as it turned out, an admirable preparation for twenty years of writing." ¹³²

¹³⁰ Quoted by Tom Hopkinson, George Orwell. Writers and their Work, 39. p. 12
¹³¹ Ibid. pp. 12-13
¹³² Laurence Brander, George Orwell. pp. 4-5
Stephen Spender seems to be the only critic who seems to have taken a different stand on Orwell. He writes:

"...his Eton background was utterly irrelevant. He was what he was simply out of good faith and honesty, not out of neurosis or ecstasy or a sense of mystery. He was perhaps the least Etonian character who has ever come from Eton." 133

Mr. Hollis argues the verdict of Mr. Spender and writes:

"I would not say that he was a typical old Etonian, but then it is the special mark of Eton that it is peculiarly easy for an old Etonian not to be a typical Etonian.... Eton left him free to develop his own interests without constraint to a degree that he might not have found equalled at any other school in the world." 134

Obviously, Spender’s Orwell is

"a Public House character, with a .... home made way of arguing from single premises, which would sometimes lead him to radiant common-sense, sometimes to crankiness." 135

Mr. Hollis believes that though Orwell was not a typical Etonian, Eton had certainly left its mark on him. According to Orwell himself Eton had not influenced him greatly academically. He says that if you have been to an English public school, you will find that

134. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 20
135. Stephen Spender, Homage to Catalonia, p. 51
"You forget your Latin and Greek within a few months of leaving school - I studied Greek for eight or ten years, and now, at thirty-three, I cannot even repeat the Greek alphabet."  

From the point of view of academic learning, it is easy to see from the above passage that Orwell's years at Eton had not been very useful. But perhaps this is not a very important matter. To Orwell himself academic learning of that kind meant little and therefore it is no wonder that on leaving Eton he decided to give up his educational career. It may be presumed that the ample intellectual freedom he must have enjoyed at Eton helped him to depart from the normal course and go all along his own way. This indeed was a turning point.

Everything said and done, it may well seem safe to claim that no public school other than Eton could have produced Orwell. In the later years, Orwell himself often remarks that as an Etonian, he was an anarchical prig. To prove that he was a prig, we may briefly examine a few other critical remarks of Mr. Connolly and Mr. Hollis. But before taking up these remarks let us first hear from Orwell himself. In The Road to Wigan Pier, where he is found making "a rapid survey of his intellectual and emotional development" 137 he writes: "At this time we all thought of ourselves as the enlightened creatures of a new age, casting off the orthodoxy that had been formed upon us." 138 And again, "I was against all authority. I had read and re-read the entire published works of Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy (at that time still regarded as dangerously 'advanced' writers) .... 139

136. George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 139
137. John Atkins, George Orwell, p. 42
138. George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, pp. 140-141
139. Ibid. pp. 141-142
The report of Mr. Connolly confirms this. He describes Orwell as "immersed in ‘The Way of All Flesh’ and the atheistic arguments of ‘Androcles and the Lion’" at the age of fifteen.

Orwell writes:

"Two incidents in The Road to Wigan Pier sticks in my mind as examples of the queer revolutionary feelings of that time. One day the master who taught us English set us a kind of knowledge paper of which one of the questions was, ‘Whom do you consider the ten greatest men now living?’ Of sixteen boys in the class ...... fifteen included Lenin in their list. This was at a snobbish expensive public school, and the year was 1920, when the horrors, of the Russian Revolution were still afresh in everyone’s mind. Also there were so-called peace celebrations 1919. Our elders had decided for us we should celebrate peace in the traditional manner by whooping over the fallen foe. We were to march into the school-yard, carrying torches, and sing jingo songs of the type of ‘Rule’ Britannia. The boys to their honour, I think-guyed the whole proceeding and sang blasphemous, and seditious words to the tune provided. I doubt whether things would happen in quite that manner now."  

Most probably Orwell appears to have departed from the rest in that

"he was solitary and that he did not as Mr. Connolly truly says, throw himself into the conflicts of college politics by which so many of the rest of us were absorbed. Perhaps there was in his rebellion against authority a kind of obstinate and puritan sincerity which contrasted a little with the more light-hearted ragging in which at any rate the greater number of the escapades of the rest of us were conceived."  

140. Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promises 1939, Also quoted by Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell p. 16
141. George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 141
142. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 17
However, Orwell was being looked upon mostly by the authorities as an “evil genius.” Mr. Hollis reports a very strange encounter of Orwell with a master in College. The master said:

“Well Blair, things can’t go on like this. Either you or I will have to go,” I’m afraid it’ll have to be you, Sir,” answered Orwell.”

Commenting on the above detail, Mr. Hollis continues:

“It may-be-I do not know that some of the masters felt that he was serious danger, where the rest of us were merely silly nuisances.”

Mr. Hollis further reports that by nature Orwell never observed the courtesy of touching one’s cap to a master when he passed one. He said:

“Orwell resented passionately the indignity of this servile action that was demanded of him.”

There is yet another little detail of Orwell’s notoriety as a ‘bad influence’ at Eton. This evidence comes from Mr. Connolly that his parents who, on receiving a bad report about their son “were upset and blamed Orwell.” V.S. Pritchet described Orwell as, “The odd man out in English writing.” This description can be seen in embryo in Mr. Hollis’s report where Orwell figures as an odd fellow.”

143. John Atkins, George Orwell, p. 42
144. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 17
145. Ibid. p. 17
146. Ibid. p. 17
147. Quoted by John Atkins, George Orwell, p. 42
148. John Atkins, George Orwell, p. 42
149. V.S. Pritchet, George Orwell an article included in, Living Writers edited by Gilvert Phelps, 1947, p. 107
150. Christopher Hollis, A Study of George Orwell, p. 14
Mr. Hollis gives here an account of his first meeting with Orwell. He writes:

"... the next time we passed each other in the passage I said to him 'Hullo Blair'—which was an outrageous thing to say to a fag. He replied 'Hullo' and smiled a little feebly. There are limits to daring, and for the moment I could think of no more to say. So after stopping and starting at one another we both passed on without a further word. It was our first conversation, and it left on me the impression that here was a boy of peculiar humour—a saturnine perhaps and not wholly benevolent humour but above all a humorist." 151

Orwell, according to Mr. Hollis was also known as the 'Election atheist.' 152 Here is an anecdote which confirm Orwell's notoriety for another vice:

"Mr. Noel Blakiston, who was a few years Orwell's junior in college, has told me of his first meeting with him. Mr. Blakiston was fielding in a cricket match. Orwell came up to him with a paper and pencil in his hand. 'I'm collecting the religions of the new boys,' said Orwell. 'Are you Cyrenial, Sceptic, Epicurean, Cynic, Neoplatonist, Confucian or Zoroastrian?' 'I'm a Christian,' said Blakiston. 'Oh' said Orwell, 'we haven't had that before.' 153

In conclusion, can we say with Orwell that his years at Eton had no formative influence on him? Of course not. Orwell himself said that at Eton he was 'relatively happy.' Then what could be the reason that in the period of

151. Ibid. p. 15
152. Ibid. p. 16
153. Ibid. p. 15
his earliest pamphleteering he did not praise Eton? The answer is obvious. In the earliest phase he could not reconcile himself to the idea of praising Eton for two reasons. Firstly, at that time, "his main literary task was to attack the class system at every point." 154 Secondly, his life at Eton where he had so evidently 'slacked off' perhaps filled him with a deep sense of guilt. Later, in Burma as a Police Officer he felt a need for expiation and accordingly he led a life of self-styled down-and-outery.

This was obviously Orwell's frame of mind during his early literary period. But he could not always remain ungrateful to Eton where he had enjoyed ample liberty, so very suited to the development of those talents which ever remained his distinguishing virtues - intellectual honesty and critical sense. Mr. Atkins remarked:

"In fact, he retained a good deal of affection for his old school and towards the end of his life he made what was for him a handsome gesture of peace." 155

By a much later writing, Orwell gives a glowing tribute to Eton. He wrote:

"It has one great virtue ..... and that is a tolerant and civilised atmosphere which gives each boy a fair chance of developing his own individuality. The reason is perhaps that, being a very rich school, it can afford a large staff, which means that the

154. John Atkins, *George Orwell*, p. 43
155. Ibid. p. 43
masters are not overworked, and also that Eton partly escaped
the reform of public schools set on foot by Dr. Arnold and
retained certain characteristics belonging to the eighteenth
century and even to the middle ages. At any rate, whatever its
future history, some of its traditions deserved to be
remembered.” 156

For the flowering of Orwell’s genius, it appears that the character and
atmosphere of Eton were just what he would need. Besides, at Eton he got
the invaluable friendship of Cyril Connolly, Sir Richard Rees and John
Strachey. The impression made by the genial and free atmosphere of Eton
was great and permanent which is further proved by another little
observation, occurring in a letter Orwell wrote to Julian Symons:

“In another year or so I shall have to be thin-king about
Richard’s schooling, but I cannot be making any plans because
one can’t see far ahead now. I am not going to let him go to a
boarding school before he is ten, and I would like him to start
off at the elementary school, if one would find a good one. It’s a
difficult question. Obviously it is democratic for everyone to go
to the same school, or at least start off there, but when you see
what the elementary schools are like, and the results, you feel
that any child that has the chance should be rescued from them.
It is quite easy, for instance, to leave those schools at 14 without
having learned to read.... I remember in 1936 meeting John
Strachey in the street-then a C.P. member or at least on the staff
of the worker-and he is telling me he had just had a son and was
putting him down for Eton. ‘How can you do that?’ and he said
that given our existing society it was the best education. Actually
I doubt whether it is the best, but in principle I don’t feel sure
he was wrong.” 157

156. George Orwell, For Ever Eton, published in Observer, August, 1948. Also quoted
by John Atkins, George Orwell, p. 44
Magazine, September, 1963, p. 46
By way of a conclusion, one may say that the years Orwell spent at Crossgates and Eton proved to be essentially the seed-time for him. Perhaps the striking features of his life and character had been set in by 1921, the year in which he left Eton. At Crossgates, the sufferings inflicted upon him threatened to stifle the nascent, turbulent individuality in him. But the breathing space he enjoyed at Eton nurtured him to become a boy of remarkable courage. And scarcely at eighteen, in the early thirties of the present century he began his writer's career and never looked back.